

Item 1

Note of Previous Meeting

Title:	Economy & Transport Programme Board
Date and time:	20 January 2011, 11am
Venue:	Local Government House, Smith Square

Attendance

Position	Councillor	Political Group	Council
Chairman	Peter Box	Labour	Wakefield MDC
Deputy Chair	Richard Knowles	Liberal Democrat	Greater Manchester ITA / Oldham MBC
Deputy Chair	Andrew Cooper	Independent	Kirklees MBC
Members	Shona Johnstone	Conservative	Cambridgeshire CC
	Andrew Carter	Conservative	Leeds City
	Kevin Lynes	Conservative	Kent CC
	Philip Atkins	Conservative	Staffordshire CC
	Norman Hume	Conservative	Essex CC
	Antonia Bance	Labour	Oxford City
	Mark Dowd	Labour	Merseyside Travel / Sefton C
	Roy Davis	Labour	Luton BC
	Heather Kidd	Liberal Democrat	Shropshire Council
	Zulfiqar Ali	Liberal Democrat	Rochdale MBC
Substitutes	Tony Page	Labour	Reading Council
Apologies			
Vice chair	Jim Harker	Conservative	Northamptonshire CC
	Mark Dowd	Labour	Merseyside Travel / Sefton Council
In attendance:	Paul Raynes; Caroline Green; Philip Mind; Laura Caton, Kamal Panchal; Fatima de Abreu (LG Group)		

Item	Decisions and actions	Action by
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1 Note of previous meeting 18 November 2010

Members approved the note of the last meeting.

2 & Investment and Growth

3 The economy and the LG Group improvement offer

At the previous meeting, Members had requested further discussion on promoting local growth and attracting inward investment. The Board agreed to discuss items 2 and 3 in conjunction.

Officers briefed the Board on the new economic landscape councils face and a suggested LG Group economy and transport improvement offer to support councils' leadership role in promoting enterprise and growth.

Members raised several issues:

- Diminishing resources in both the private and public sectors mean that the Group should focus on supporting councils and LEPs to find smart ways of working and to exploit other funding sources;
- The Group needs to support smaller towns and cities to be effective players in LEPs;
- There is a risk that public sector investment in economic growth will be hindered by limitations to capital borrowing and rising interest rates;
- SMEs want tailored, local support and the council and the LEP is best placed to provide this;
- The Group can help to promote the importance of councils' economic development role;
- The Group's transport improvement offer should include supporting councils bidding for the Sustainable Transport Fund;
- Councils, supported by the Group, need to think about how the new sub-regional landscape relates to Europe which is used to interacting with regional administrative structures.

Decision

Members agreed the outline Economy and Transport Programme improvement offer, stressing the need for support to LEPs.

Action

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| • Officers to provide a further report once the Group business planning process and re-structuring is complete. | Kamal Panchal |
| • Officers to circulate further information on the DFT highways efficiency programme. | Kamal Panchal |

4 Universal Credit and localising Council Tax Benefit

Members discussed the implications for councils of the introduction of universal credit and abolition of council tax benefit.

Members emphasised the risks to councils in the government's proposals, including:

- The potentially very significant consequences for district councils because of the financial risk involved in the localisation of responsibility for council tax reliefs, particularly from a rising volume of claimants at a time when the number of unemployed people is increasing;
- On housing benefit, councils that have housing stock could face risks where the housing element of universal credit is paid direct to recipients, if it led to increased rent arrears;
- A local delivery model is needed to ensure that the face-to-face interaction is built around customer need, taking account of local circumstances;
- The proposed localisation of the social fund creates a particular set of risks that will need to be managed and considered alongside the wider delivery of universal credit. Members felt that demand for help with short term financial hardship is likely to increase;
- Ministers need to understand the effect of their reforms on different types of communities, particularly rural ones.

Members noted the LG Group's lobbying of DWP to date and the close working with the District Councils Network and professional groups.

Decision

Members noted the report and asked that their views be reported to the LG Group Executive in order to inform continued engagement with the government.

Action

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| • Officers to draft a note on behalf of the Board for the LG Group Executive. | Philip Mind |
| • Officers to consult with the District Councils Network on the preparation of the advice to the Executive. | Philip Mind |

5 Concessionary Fares

In the light of the local government finance settlement, officers updated Members on how government proposes to manage the transfer in funding for concessionary fares from district to county councils, and the Group's lobbying activities in response.

Members emphasised that the government's decision will create turbulence for local authorities at a time when they are already under unprecedented financial pressure and will not result in the

fair and equitable transfer in funding that we argued for. This will potentially affect all types of authority, even unitary councils whose duties remain unchanged. Members noted that Cllr Box had written to the Leaders of district and county councils to share some initial LGA analysis on the potential impact of the change and to ask for further intelligence to inform our lobbying.

Cllrs Page, Johnstone and Knowles referred to the forthcoming meeting with the Bus Partnership Forum.

It was agreed that a letter would be sent to Norman Baker MP and Bob Neill MP, detailing the Board's concerns in advance of the meeting of the Forum, which Norman Baker would also be attending.

Decision

Members agreed the further lobbying actions proposed in the report.

Action

- Officers to provide a briefing note for Members in advance of the meeting of the Bus Partnership Forum on 26 January.
- Officers to circulate a draft letter to Ministers for Lead Members' approval and send out before 26 January.

Caroline Green

Laura Caton

6 Rail Investment

Officers updated Members on the government's planned investment in rail rolling stock and improving value for money through rail franchises.

Members said that local transport authorities should have a bigger role in rail franchises as part of delivering integrated transport networks and that the LGG should submit a response to the West Coast franchise consultation. The LGG's lobbying activity should reflect the fact that rail franchises is a separate issue from rolling stock, where the key issues are concern about the capacity of the rail network and the pace of electrification.

Decision

Members agreed the suggested lobbying positions and actions in the report, subject to treating franchises and rolling stock as separate issues.

Action

- Officers to provide a report on the West Coast Franchise Consultation at the next Board meeting.

Caroline Green

7 Streetworks – proposed positions

The Board discussed issues regarding councils' powers around streetworks and agreed the suggested lobbying positions within the report.

Members referred to the New Roads and Street Works Act (NRSWA) and provisions which allow councils to take a 'bond' or deposit from utility companies to recoup the costs of making good. It was agreed that Cllr Box should write to Ministers requesting that this part of the legislation be enacted.

Action

- Officers to draft a letter to Norman Baker MP for approval by Lead Members. Caroline Green

8 Oral Feedback from Members / Any other business

Members agreed to attach the monthly chair's reports to Councillors' Forum under this item in future.

Members agreed to hold an Outreach event in Cornwall to meet local councils and give them the opportunity to influence the work of the Board. Given the distance, it was agreed that the visit should take place over two days with a short Board meeting and dinner on the first day, following by discussions and study tour visits with local councils on day 2. Members suggested arranging parallel sessions on the economy and transport. Cllr Cooper said that one session could focus on Cornwall's solar power plant.

Action

- Officers to canvas all members and substitutes for dates for a two-day meeting in early / mid July. Fatima de Abreu
- Officers to include chair's reports in future agendas. Fatima de Abreu

9 Education, skills and apprenticeships

Members noted the report.

10 Economic outlook

Members noted the report.

11 EU funding

Members noted the report and agreed a letter from the Chairman should be sent to Baroness Hanham, confirming that Lead Members would like to meet her to discuss ERDF funding.

Action

- Officers to draft a letter to Baroness Hanham for Chairman's approval and take forward with government officials. Laura Caton /
Nick Porter

12 Correspondence with Ministers

Members noted the correspondence and agreed that Cllr Box respond to Mark Prisk requesting a meeting on RDA assets.

Action

- Officers to draft a letter to Mark Prisk for the Chairman's approval.

Laura Caton

Date of next meeting: Thursday 24 March 2011, Local Government House